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Life in Mr. Lincoln's Navy; Lamson of the Gettysburg: The Civil War Letters of Lieutenant Roswell H. Lamson

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the Naval Institute Press. In 1984 he received a grant from the Office of Naval History to write *Salvage Man*.

Alden paints a portrait of an extraordinarily competent, capable, "hands on" officer who was tenacious, focused, and knew exactly what needed to be done and how to do it. Ellsberg was blunt and direct. He built organizations where none existed, often with little support or even against serious resistance from higher authorities. He was a "shade tree" mechanic and a robust field engineer who taught men how to do their jobs under difficult circumstances, leading by doing himself. At the age of fifty-one, he was diving on wrecked ships, placing pumps and explosives. In his own words, "It never pays to quit until you're dead."

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Ringle, Dennis J. *Life in Mr. Lincoln's Navy*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1998. 202pp. $32.95

McPherson, James M., and Patricia R. McPherson, eds. *Lamson of the Gettysburg: The Civil War Letters of Lieutenant Roswell H. Lamson, U.S. Navy*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997. 240pp. $25

Following the Union victory at Vicksburg in the summer of 1863, President Abraham Lincoln wrote, "The Father of Waters again goes unvexed to the sea," referring to the Mississippi River, now entirely under Union control. Yet in acknowledging the Union armies' victories in the West as well as the East, he added, "Nor must Uncle Sam's Web feet be forgotten. They have been present, not only on the deep sea, the broad bay, and the rapid river, but also up the narrow muddy bayou, and wherever the ground was a little damp, they have been, and made their tracks." Lincoln's "Web feet" of course were the vessels and seamen of the United States Navy, which had contributed mightily to the Union effort.

Of the plethora of books and manuscripts on the American Civil War, surprisingly few address that contribution. Two recent studies help rectify this imbalance. Dennis J. Ringle's *Life in Mr. Lincoln's Navy* is the first study covering all aspects of the common sailor's life in the Union navy, including recruiting, clothing, training, daily shipboard routine, diet, wages, health, and combat experience. This thoroughly documented text provides more than a glimpse of nautical life in the fledgling world of steam engineering. It also offers a fresh look at the social history of the mid-nineteenth century.

Using ships' logs, published and unpublished letters, and diaries, Ringle examines the service lives of enlisted men assigned to naval vessels on the high seas and internal waterways. Contrasting the Union navy of 1865 to that of the antebellum period, he sees far more than a transition from a coastal force to a six-hundred-ship fleet manned by 51,500 sailors. Over the course of the war, the Navy successfully applied new technologies of steam and iron and altered naval warfare forever. In the process of contributing to the North's ultimate victory, it also participated in joint operations that forwarded

the war effort, and it established and maintained a blockade that eventually strangled the South.

War, however, is also a fertile field for social experiment, and Lincoln's navy was hardly an exception. The need for increased manpower led to important changes in the fleet. Pay was increased, flogging abolished, and uniforms improved. Most significantly, the Union "tar" demonstrated that large-scale racial integration was not only feasible but practical. Due to the active recruitment of former slaves and freed blacks, by 1865 fully 20 percent of the navy's enlisted force was African American. Regrettably, postwar decades witnessed the loss of racial equality; the black enlisted component decreased to only 9.5 percent by the Spanish-American War. In the final analysis, however, the common sailor in Lincoln's navy could take solace in knowing that he helped save the Union and that he laid the social foundation for a future U.S. Navy second to none.

The officer corps also experienced a transformation during the Civil War. A representative officer was Roswell Hawks Lamson (U.S. Naval Academy, 1862), whose class was commissioned a year early when the Civil War began. Over the next four years, Lamson commanded more ships and flotillas than any other officer of his age or rank, culminating in his command in 1864 of the navy's fastest ship, the USS *Gettysburg*. Lamson also pioneered techniques in the dangerous new naval mission of minesweeping, as commander of the Torpedo and Picket Division on the James River in May–June 1864, with the principal duty of clearing the river of Confederate mines.

Editors James and Patricia McPherson believe that personal letters to his cousin and his fiancée provide the most vivid portrayal available of blockade duty in the Civil War. Blockade duty, however, was only one mission at which Lamson excelled. In 1861 he directed the big deck guns on the USS *Wabash*, which did the most damage to enemy forts at Hatteras Inlet and Port Royal; he commanded a gunboat fleet on the Nansemond River and helped stop General James Longstreet's advance on Norfolk in the Suffolk campaign of April 1863; and he skippered the ship that towed the USS *Louisiana*, packed with more than two hundred tons of gunpowder, under the guns of Fort Fisher in December 1864.

As the editors point out, Lamson always seemed to be where the action was in the naval war on the Atlantic coast. Nowhere was this more evident than during his final action in the war, the attack on Fort Fisher, near Wilmington, North Carolina. Lamson recorded that the attack on Wilmington had to be postponed indefinitely because the Army was not ready; too many men had been sent home to vote for Mr. Lincoln. Lamson himself had no opportunity to vote, but he confessed he would have voted for Lincoln, "though he did not think the president had a *single* qualification for the head of a nation—except that he was pledged to continue the war till a lasting peace was established." Following an unsuccessful assault on Fort Fisher in December 1865, a joint Army-Navy force attacked again, on 15 January, with Lamson leading a force of seventy volunteers from the *Gettysburg*. This time the Union forces carried the fortress,

though Lamson, having reached the edge of the sea parapet, was shot through the left arm and shoulder. The same day he wrote, "It had been a dreadful Sunday, but we have done *something* toward ending the war." Lee's surrender at Appomattox found Lamson en route to the Brooklyn Navy Yard, where he was to report for duty on the USS *Colorado* as Fleet Lieutenant of the European Squadron.

Like the enlisted men, Lamson found life in the postwar era anticlimactic. Rapid demobilization, coupled with curtailed promotions, led to his resignation in the spring of 1866. Declining health, marked by recurring bouts of malaria and a debilitating illness diagnosed as "locomotor ataxia," a spinal disease that caused partial paralysis of feet and legs, led him to apply for a pension in the decade before he died. Due to Lamson's distinguished service during the war, the Navy reappointed him lieutenant and placed him on the retired list in 1895. Lamson died on 14 August 1903.

Of the 2,200,000 men who fought for the Union, only 115,000 served in the Navy. Yet the U.S. Navy's contribution far exceeded that implied by the 5 percent of the Union force that it represented. Warships maintained an increasingly effective blockade of Southern ports and also protected coastal shipping lanes and inland rivers essential to logistical support of Northern armies. Most important, Army-Navy task forces won some of the most significant Northern victories of the war: Fort Donelson, Vicksburg, Port Hudson, Mobile Bay, and Fort Fisher. Additionally, the Navy won many important battles on its own: New Orleans, Fort Henry, Hatteras Inlet, and Memphis. Ringle and the McPhersons are themselves pioneers in the belated recognition of the crucial role of the Union navy in the war's outcome.

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Luraghi, Raimondo. Translated by Paolo E. Coletta. *A History of the Confederate Navy*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1996. 514pp. $39.95

At long last, the much-needed modern history of the Confederate naval experience during the American Civil War has been written. What is unusual about this history is that it was done not by an American but by a very capable and distinguished Italian historian, who specializes in American history at the University of Genoa. Perhaps because of his international roots, the author was able to argue effectively his point that much of the Confederate navy had its origins in European shipyards. Thoroughly researched and meticulously annotated, Luraghi's work is a joy to read from start to finish.

Because Luraghi's purpose was to write a comprehensive history of the Confederate navy during the Civil War, he creates some inherent problems for readers who want to know more about a particular ship or naval campaign. For example, while he devotes an entire chapter to the famous and well documented encounter between USS *Monitor* and CSS *Virginia*, he gives short shrift to the important exploits of the commerce raider CSS *Shenandoah*.